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This is a draft chapter. The final version is available in Handbook of Experimental Social Psychology, edited by Chadly Stern, published in 2025, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035310661.00029>

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How individuals navigate and mitigate intergroup conflicts: current insights and future directions

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Citation:

Yang, Z. R., & Kung, F. Y. (2025). How individuals navigate and mitigate intergroup conflicts: current insights and future directions. *Handbook of Experimental Social Psychology*, 334-353.

How individuals navigate and mitigate intergroup conflicts: current insights and future directions

Life in the modern world involves frequent encounters with intergroup conflicts, the perceived incompatibility of goals or values between individuals who are categorized as members of different social groups (Böhm et al., 2020). In the U.S., the death of George Floyd has sparked widespread protests and political disputes over racial injustice and police brutality (e.g., Bowleg et al., 2022). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, discriminatory incidents and hostility towards Asians and Asian Americans have underscored differences in the beliefs about immigration and American identity (e.g., Wu et al., 2023). On a global scale, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is characterized by recurring cycles of violence, strained relations, and peace negotiations, decreasing people's hope for conflict resolution (e.g., Hasler et al., 2023).

Intergroup issues like these not only shed light on societal group divisions and systemic inequalities, but also exemplify the tensions individuals experience when they navigate intergroup interactions in their daily lives. Whether it is through direct interactions with members of different groups or more indirectly by witnessing conflict events or reading about them in the news, in each intergroup conflict, people are faced with an invitation that challenges them as to how they would approach thinking about or even engaging in the conflict. While it is essential to acknowledge that resolving intergroup conflicts and achieving real peace necessitates large-scale changes at the systemic level, this objective does not negate the need to recognize that individuals, through their actions and interactions, also play a crucial role in shaping relationships, dialogues, groups, and norms, ultimately helping to resolve intergroup conflicts (e.g., Koppel et al., 2023). To do so, we need knowledge to help individuals engage in respectful

disagreement that is free from animosity and hatred, and to create an inclusive environment where people from diverse backgrounds can thrive together.

In this chapter, we review and highlight recent research on social cognitive processes that affect how individuals approach intergroup conflicts. Instead of providing an exhaustive review of intergroup conflict resolution studies that traces back decades of work in social psychology and beyond (e.g., Böhm et al., 2020; Bornstein, 2003; Tajfel, 1982; Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010), this focused review highlights emerging work on three sets of factors—*lay beliefs*, *reasoning strategies*, and *self-regulatory orientations*—and their roles in intergroup conflict resolution. Table 1 provides a summary of these factors and examples of their relevant findings. In some cases, conflicts are deemed necessary and helpful for societal changes in the direction of reducing group inequalities (see Dixon et al., 2012). Here, instead of delving into varied functions of conflicts and specifics in an intergroup context, we highlight the accumulated insights into the general factors that facilitate or hamper positive feelings and behaviors of an individual toward building social harmony between people across groups affected by ongoing conflicts. Additionally, we discuss issues related to the design of training and intervention that leverage these factors to manage intergroup conflicts. We will conclude by outlining the remaining issues and future directions we think are important to consider for research and practice in this area of research, with the hope of providing both theoretical and practical insights to help individuals collectively build a more peaceful and harmonious society.

Table 1. A Summary of the Current Research on Individual Factors in Intergroup Conflicts

Individual Factor	Lay Beliefs		Reasoning Strategies		Self-regulatory Orientations	
	Malleability Beliefs	Zero-Sum Beliefs	Perspective Taking	Wise Reasoning	Motivational Orientations	Emotion Regulation Strategies
Definition	People's lay beliefs about the malleability of human characteristics, also known as mindsets (Rattan & Georgeac, 2017).	The belief that one group's gains are inevitably at the expense of the other (Davidai & Tepper, 2023).	The cognitive process of attempting to imagine the world from someone else's point of view or placing oneself in someone else's shoes (Galinsky et al., 2005)	A set of wisdom-related reasoning strategies, including humility, observer's viewpoint, perspective taking, evolving situations, and search for compromise (Brienza et al., 2018)	Individual differences in how one pursues their goals and experiences different motivational states (Murphy et al., 2011)	The strategies people use to regulate their emotions (e.g., cognitive change, situation modification) (Goldenberg et al., 2016)
Example Findings	Malleability belief of social groups led to more positive behavioral (e.g., Kung et al., 2018) and attitudinal (e.g., Halperin et al., 2011) intergroup outcomes.	Zero-sum belief about immigration predicted people's less positive attitudes toward policies that support immigrants (e.g., Davidai & Ongis, 2019).	Perspective taking reduced outgroup prejudice (e.g., Shih et al., 2009) and racial bias (e.g., Todd et al., 2011), and decreased in-group favoritism (e.g., Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000).	Wise reasoning strategies led to higher outgroup positivity and lower affective polarization in intergroup conflict across different contexts (e.g., Brienza et al., 2021).	Avoidance goal orientation (e.g., Plant & Butz, 2006) and prevention regulatory focus (e.g., Shah et al., 2004) predicted higher anxiety in interracial interactions.	Cognitive reappraisal strategy led to greater support for conciliatory policies and less support for aggressive policies in Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Halperin et al., 2011)
	Malleability belief of racial bias led to White individuals' more learning strategies when interacting with Black individuals (Neel & Shapiro, 2012)	Perception of symbolic threats led to higher zero-sum belief about Christian-LGBT conflict (Wilkins et al., 2022)	Perspective taking could backfire for individuals of minority groups (e.g., Bruneau & Saxe, 2012)	Wise reasoning strategies promoted respectful partisan engagement (e.g., Puryear & Gray, 2021)	Internal motivation to respond without prejudice promoted behaviors to understand and engage Black individuals (LaCosse & Plant, 2020)	Cognitive reappraisal reduced people's negative emotions but also decreased their intentions to engage in political actions (Ford et al., 2019).

Lay Beliefs

Individuals enter intergroup conflicts with preexisting beliefs about how things work. These lay beliefs serve as mental templates that influence how individuals interpret their social interactions and shape their attitudes and behaviors towards the outgroup, or people who belong to or support the other side of the conflict, playing a powerful role in determining how the intergroup conflict unfolds. Here we summarize recent work on malleability and zero-sum beliefs.

Malleability Beliefs

A rich tradition in the study of lay beliefs in the context of intergroup conflict is the focus on people's beliefs about the malleability of human characteristics, also known as mindsets. In general, some people hold a malleable/growth mindset and see characteristics (e.g., intelligence) as changeable over time, while others hold a fixed mindset and believe these traits are stable. Research has shown that individual differences in mindsets (either chronically held or temporally activated) could predict meaningful outcomes in various social contexts. In the intergroup context, specifically, people may hold more malleable or fixed beliefs about the social groups, themselves, and the relationship between the groups in conflict. In general, malleable beliefs tend to be associated with more positive intergroup conflict attitudes and outcomes, and broadly speaking, past research has looked at the beliefs about social groups and personal attributes.

Beliefs about the malleability of social groups. People hold mindsets about social groups, such as race or nationality, that shape their attitudes toward outgroup members (Hong et al., 2009). Those who believe that social groups are malleable tend to view group differences as socially constructed, learned, and subject to change. As a result, they might be more likely to recognize the individuality of people from outgroups, instead of labeling them based on the

groups. Conversely, those who view social groups as fixed may see group differences as deeply rooted in biological differences and immutable, leading to more prejudices and biases toward outgroups.

One important application of these mindsets is in conflicts between racial-ethnic groups. For example, a malleable mindset of race-ethnicity promotes interracial trust, which can further result in mutually beneficial intergroup outcomes, such as higher joint gains in interracial negotiations (Kung et al., 2018). A malleable mindset also helps reduce ethnocentrism, using one's own ethnic culture as the basis to judge (and often undermine) other cultures, which in turn promotes intergroup outcomes that are beneficial to diverse groups and more positive reactions to multicultural policies (Huang et al., 2023; Kung et al., 2023). In contrast, a fixed view of race-ethnicity (i.e., racial essentialism) may lead to negative intergroup outcomes, including a greater tendency to engage in racial categorization and greater sensitivity to racial group membership (Chao et al., 2013). Similarly, another body of research has demonstrated the intergroup benefits of a malleable mindset about social groups in the context of Palestinian-Israeli conflicts (Goldenberg et al., 2017, 2018; Halperin et al., 2011; Weiss-Klayman et al., 2020). For example, in one study, when Palestinian-Israeli adolescents were led to believe that groups are malleable, their cooperation tendency increased in subsequent intergroup contact (Goldenberg et al., 2017).

Beliefs about the malleability of personal characteristics. People also hold mindsets about personal attributes that affect subsequent attitudes and behaviors (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Due to the tensions involved, intergroup conflicts to many can be negative in nature, and often due to their scope, intergroup conflicts take time to change. In this situation, the beliefs that people can change sustain and promote efforts to resolve the conflict.

One important domain this mindset applies to is one's prejudice and bias. While we all can hold certain biases, the belief that these biased attitudes can change helps determine people's behaviors in intergroup interactions. For example, White individuals who view racial bias as malleable (vs. fixed) tend to use learning-oriented strategies (e.g., seeking feedback and taking the other person's perspective) when they interact with Black individuals, rather than performance-oriented strategies (e.g., avoiding talking about race and overcompensating by being overly nice) (Neel & Shapiro, 2012). Even for 8–13-year-old children, a malleable mindset of prejudice can increase their willingness to engage in cross-race interactions (Pauker et al., 2022).

Another related mindset is the belief about empathy. Empathy, broadly speaking, is defined as an individual's ability to understand and share other people's thoughts and feelings (Davis, 1983). As research suggests, empathy can nurture positive relations between different groups. People tend to display more empathy towards their ingroups than outgroups, resulting in biased attitudes towards outgroups (e.g., Behler & Berry, 2022; Bruneau et al., 2017; Weisz & Zaki, 2018). However, individuals vary in their beliefs regarding the malleability of empathy. Those who believe in its developmental nature, rather than seeing it as a fixed trait, are more inclined to engage in behaviors that demand heightened empathic efforts during intergroup interactions. For instance, those who believe empathy is malleable are more likely to actively listen to the emotional personal narratives of individuals belonging to racial outgroups (Schumann et al., 2014). Relatedly, more recent research suggested that empowering people with the belief that empathy is unlimited can increase outgroup empathy and prosocial actions towards outgroup members (Hasson et al., 2022).

Zero-Sum Beliefs

The second broad set of beliefs to highlight in intergroup conflicts is zero-sum beliefs, which refers to the assumptions that one group's gains are inevitably at the expense of the other. Irrespective of the objective reality of the distribution of resources between the two groups, individuals may endorse zero-sum beliefs to different degrees, on different levels. On the general level, people may tend to believe in the zero-sum nature of social relations and economic exchanges in general; on the domain-specific level, people also hold zero-sum beliefs about two parties in a specific intergroup relation context (e.g., China and the U.S. in the international relation context), which can be especially powerful in shaping intergroup attitudes and behaviors (Davidai & Tepper, 2023). Across many social group contexts, research has found that domain-specific zero-sum beliefs can lead to negative intergroup outcomes. For example, higher zero-sum beliefs about immigration could predict people's less positive attitudes toward policies that support immigrants (Davidai & Ongis, 2019; Esses et al., 1998).

When individuals perceive a higher threat from their outgroup in a conflict, they are more likely to view the relation between the two groups as zero-sum. Taking the example of the conflict between Christian people and LGBT individuals, research shows that when Christian people perceive higher symbolic threats from LGBT individuals, they are also more likely to believe that the relation between LGBT individuals and Christian individuals is zero-sum (e.g., as one group faces less discrimination, the other group faces more) (Wilkins et al., 2022). Extending this line of work on the antecedents of zero-sum beliefs, more intervention research is needed to understand ways in which we could reduce people's zero-sum beliefs to improve intergroup relations.

Reasoning Strategies

Moving beyond preexisting beliefs, individuals differ in how they reason about intergroup conflicts, and that is the cognitive approaches people take to process, understand, and use information during and about intergroup conflicts. In intergroup situations, people tend to favor their own group or people they agree with, leading to polarized attitudes toward one's ingroup and outgroup (e.g., Brewer, 1999). Adaptive reasoning strategies help people transcend their own interests and take a more balanced view of the two groups in conflict, leading to more optimal or mutually beneficial intergroup outcomes. In this regard, the literature highlights two interrelated reasoning strategies: perspective taking and wise reasoning.

Perspective Taking

Perspective taking is a classic approach in the intergroup literature, and it involves the attempt to imagine the world from someone else's point of view or placing oneself in someone else's shoes (Galinsky et al., 2005). When people from different social groups are in conflict, they often have different values and worldviews, which can lead to hostility and prejudice. However, understanding the perspective of the outgroup can counter these negative tendencies. Across different intergroup contexts, many studies have found that perspective taking could predict better intergroup conflict resolution outcomes, such as reduced prejudice toward outgroups (e.g., Shih et al., 2009; Vescio et al., 2003), the suppressed expression of automatic racial bias (e.g., Todd et al., 2011), and lower in-group favoritism (e.g., Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), etc.

As reviewed by Todd and Galinsky (2014), perspective taking could improve intergroup relations through both affective and cognitive mechanisms. Firstly, perspective taking can increase empathy towards outgroup members, as it encourages people to see things from their perspective, understand their feelings, and appreciate their experiences. Secondly, perspective

taking can shift people's attribution of outgroup members' circumstances from dispositional factors (e.g., personality, character) to non-dispositional factors (e.g., situational factors), thus promoting a more nuanced and less stereotypical understanding of the outgroup. Finally, perspective taking can also contribute to "self-other merging," which involves seeing oneself and others as more similar (Galinsky et al., 2005).

Perspective taking is not without limitation, however; in fact, some recent findings suggest that it may even backfire in certain situations. When the two groups in conflict have salient differentiation in representation and power dynamics, perspective taking can backfire among minority individuals. For instance, in the context of conflict between LGBT individuals and Christian individuals, perspective taking predicted more positive evaluations of ingroup members for LGBT individuals (i.e., a minority group in this context), exacerbating the existing bias in intergroup attitudes (Brienza et al., 2021). Similarly, Bruneau and Saxe (2012) found that perspective taking only predicted more positive intergroup attitudes for White Americans, but predicted less positive intergroup attitudes for Mexican Americans (i.e., a minority group in this context). Because minoritized individuals have less representation in society and their voice is less likely to be heard, it could be more useful to give them the opportunities to express their views (i.e., perspective giving), in order to improve their positive intergroup attitudes.

Wise Reasoning

Building on the benefits of perspective taking, recent research has taken a more holistic approach to examine a set of reasoning strategies used in conflicts based on wisdom philosophies. For centuries, philosophers have been discussing wisdom. From Socrates' writing about one's own ignorance (Benson, 2000), Solomon's Book of Proverbs, to the contemplation of change in the I Ching (Baynes & Wilhelm, 2011), wisdom has been viewed as an important

virtue that helps people navigate challenging social problems. Recently, scientists have become increasingly interested in studying wisdom (e.g., Ardelt, 1997), which led to the development of the psychological measurement of wisdom and studies of its impacts on real-world social issues.

Conceptualizing wisdom from a social-cognitive perspective, Brienza et al. (2018) proposed the concept of wise reasoning that encompasses five major elements of wisdom-related reasoning strategies (HOPES model; Yang et al., 2024): (i) *Humility* (recognizing the limits of one's knowledge), (ii) *Observer's viewpoint* (looking at the bigger picture), (iii) *Perspective taking* (trying to understand situations from multiple angles), (iv) *Evolving situations* (accommodating for fluctuation or change in situations), (v) *Search for compromise* (integrating different interests in the resolution). Together, these strategies can form a comprehensive wise reasoning process that transcends self-centered tendencies and promotes prosocial intentions (Brienza et al., 2018). Because wise reasoning helps people achieve a balance between their own interests and those of others, we should expect that adopting wise reasoning strategies could help people maintain more harmonious social relations. Indeed, emerging research has found the benefits of wise reasoning in intergroup conflict resolution.

Wise reasoning could lead to more positive and less biased attitudes toward outgroups (Yang et al., 2024). During social interactions, people's tendency to categorize themselves and others creates a psychological boundary between ingroups and outgroups (e.g., Turner & Reynolds, 2012), creating negative feelings toward the outgroup and positive feelings towards the ingroup. This phenomenon, known as affective polarization (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2019), can be further exacerbated by major societal events and social media, leading to escalated intergroup conflicts. However, research shows that adopting wise reasoning can buffer individuals from outgroup negativity and reduce affective polarization in real-world conflicts. A series of studies

on worldwide intergroup conflicts between 2014 and 2020 (e.g., the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong and the same-sex marriage debate in the U.S.) have consistently shown that individuals who have stronger wise reasoning tend to feel more positive towards outgroup members, reducing the affective polarization (Brienza et al., 2021). Wise reasoning helps people disagree without hate and fosters mutual understanding between groups with different identities, serving as a critical foundation for positive intergroup relations.

The benefits of wise reasoning can also be manifested in cooperative behaviors. Intergroup conflicts often lead to competition with the outgroup to protect oneself or gain resources, making cooperation difficult. However, wise reasoning can help individuals balance their group's interests with the interests of the outgroup, leading to cooperative behaviors. For example, studies using social dilemma games in the lab show that individuals with higher wise reasoning are more likely to cooperate with their counterparts (Brienza et al., 2018). In real-world situations, individuals with higher wise reasoning are also more likely to use cooperative (vs. self-protective) solutions to resolve conflicts in a way that benefits both parties (e.g., trying to solve the problem together or looking for third-party mediators) (Brienza et al., 2018). These findings suggest that wise reasoning helps individuals see the bigger picture and search for integration of their own and their partner's interests, leading to more cooperation between two parties in conflicts.

Research usually studies wise reasoning from an intrapersonal perspective, but recent research also suggests that social perceptions of an outgroup's wisdom can also foster positive relations between groups. Puryear and Gray (2021) found that the perception of one's political opponent being wise can improve cross-partisan relations. Specifically, when participants watched videos of their political opponents expressing willingness to find pragmatic and

compromising solutions to political dilemmas, they were more willing to engage in a respectful conversation because they perceived their opponents as more moral and rational. This study highlights the potential of wise reasoning in promoting a more civil and harmonious political environment in this divisive world. Future research should further explore how wise reasoning improves intergroup relations through intrapersonal and interpersonal mechanisms in tandem.

Self-Regulatory Orientations

The two sections so far have focused on the relatively “cold,” cognitive factors (i.e., beliefs and reasoning) in intergroup conflicts. In this section, we shift the attention to “hot” motivational and emotional processes that contribute to intergroup conflict resolution. Intergroup conflicts and interactions generally can be stress-inducing, and people commonly feel motivated to avoid outgroups and experience negative emotions across divisions (Richeson & Shelton, 2007; Richeson & Sommers, 2016). Nonetheless, negative emotions are not inevitable; individuals differ in how they manage these heated feelings due to their self-regulatory orientations. An open and understanding approach can help diffuse conflicts, while defensiveness tends to breed further conflict. Understanding these “hot” intrapersonal differences provides insight into conflict de-escalation and the challenges of building bridges across group divides.

Motivational Orientations

Recent research integrating motivation science and intergroup studies suggests four aspects of individual differences in motivational orientations that can influence intergroup interactions, with most studies focusing on interracial/interethnic interactions (e.g., Murphy et al., 2011).

Approach and avoidance goal orientations. First, people have different goal orientations in terms of pursuing their desired goals: approach goal orientation involves reducing the perceived distance between one's current state and their desired end states, while avoidance goal orientation focuses on increasing the perceived distance between one's current state and their undesired end states (Elliot, 2006). In intergroup contexts, those with a stronger approach orientation should be more likely to actively engage with other groups, seeking collaboration and mutual benefits. Individuals with a stronger avoidance orientation may aim to minimize potential costs, and thus withdraw from intergroup interactions. In the interracial context, for example, if non-Black participants felt they could not navigate an interaction with a Black individual well, and therefore had a higher avoidance goal orientation, they also behaved more awkwardly and anxiously toward a Black individual (Plant & Butz, 2006).

Promotion and prevention regulatory focus. A similar but different set of individual differences is the promotion and prevention foci (Higgins, 1998). Even if two individuals are both approaching their desired end states, they can still mentally represent their goals in different ways: a promotion focus represents goals as aspirations, concerned with achieving gains (vs. non-gains), and channels people to use eager strategies; while a prevention focus represents one's goals as obligations, concerns with achieving non-losses (vs. losses), and channels people to use vigilant strategies. In intergroup interactions, those with a stronger promotion focus may take risks to learn about their interaction partner, while those with a stronger prevention focus aim to preserve the status quo. Consistent with this notion, research has found that prevention-focused (vs. promotion-focused) individuals tend to avoid their outgroups and feel less relaxed (and more anxious) toward them (Shah et al., 2004). For people from dominant groups (e.g., White individuals in the interracial context), a prevention focus may especially manifest as trying

to prevent oneself from appearing prejudiced and biased. Ironically, research suggests that a prevention focus could backfire, resulting in expressing negative affect toward one's outgroup partner in the interaction (Vorauer et al., 2009).

Learning and performance orientations. Moreover, individuals differ in their learning and performance goal orientations, which have additional implications for intergroup interactions. Learning goal orientation focuses on mastering knowledge and understanding, while performance goal orientation emphasizes demonstrating competence (e.g., Vandewalle, 1997). Those with a higher learning goal orientation may approach intergroup interactions with curiosity and empathy, aiming for mutual understanding. On the other hand, individuals with a higher performance goal orientation may engage in behaviors that compete for status and resources or manage one's social impressions. In the context of interracial interactions, taking a learning (vs. performance) goal orientation can be beneficial for individuals from both the majority and minority groups. For instance, for both Black and White student participants, having a stronger learning goal orientation predicted greater interest and comfort in intergroup contact (Migacheva & Tropp, 2013). For Black individuals, adopting a learning goal orientation helps combat identity threats (Green et al., 2021). For White individuals, inducing a learning goal orientation reduces their avoidance behavior (i.e., seating distance) in an anticipated interracial interaction (Goff et al., 2008).

Internal and external motivations. Finally, individuals exhibit different levels of internal and external motivations in intergroup contexts, with internal motivation rooted in personal values and intrinsic rewards, while external motivation is driven by societal expectations and external rewards. Those with higher internal motivation prioritize positive relationships and intergroup equity, acting based on their internalized values. In contrast,

individuals with higher external motivation may prioritize social acceptance and conformity to social norms. A body of research in this area focuses on people's internal versus external motivation to respond without prejudice in interracial interactions (e.g., Monteith et al., 2009; Plant & Devine, 1998). For example, research shows that when non-Black individuals interact with Black people, those internally motivated individuals tend to focus on strategies that approach positive outcomes (e.g., egalitarian); while those externally motivated individuals tend to focus on avoiding negative outcomes (e.g., prejudiced), which leads to being seen as more prejudiced by their partners (Plant et al., 2010). Internal motivation may also direct people's attention toward their intergroup partners (vs. themselves). For instance, White people who are internally (vs. externally) motivated to respond without prejudice focus more on understanding and engaging with Black partners during interracial interactions, rather than focusing on their own experience and image (LaCosse & Plant, 2020).

Overall, research suggests that intergroup interactions can benefit from adopting a motivational system that focuses on approaching desired outcomes, promoting gains, learning new information, and fulfilling intrinsic values. As an example, Trawalter and Richeson (2006) manipulated White participants' motivational orientations before they engaged in interracial interactions: some were told to avoid appearing prejudiced, some were told to reframe the interaction as an opportunity to have a positive intercultural exchange, while others were not given any instructions as a control group. By focusing on achieving an intercultural dialogue, the second prompt potentially activated the four positive motivational orientations reviewed above. Participants who received that prompt felt most comfortable during the interracial interaction. Moreover, they performed better on a subsequent Stroop task, indicating that their self-regulatory resources were depleted to the least extent after the interracial interaction. In a word, by

harnessing motivational orientations, one may achieve positive personal and interpersonal outcomes in intergroup interactions. Future research in this area should examine more intergroup contexts, beyond interracial interactions between Black and White people.

Emotion Regulation Strategies

Intergroup conflicts can trigger a wide range of strong emotions, many of which are negative. These emotions can include disgust (e.g., Hodson & Costello, 2007), fear (e.g., Giner-Sorolla & Russell, 2019), anger (e.g., Idan et al., 2018), and anxiety (e.g., Wang et al., 2019). When groups have conflicts, people may feel threatened or disrespected, fostering such difficult emotions. However, individuals need to manage these feelings in productive ways to reduce tensions between groups and improve relations. When emotions run high, they can trigger harmful actions that escalate conflicts. But if people can regulate their negative responses, they open the space to connect with others as fellow human beings and seek common ground.

Despite numerous studies examining the role of emotions in intergroup conflicts, there is still little research on how people can actively regulate their emotions to de-escalate and resolve conflicts. Recently, researchers have introduced the classic process model of emotion regulation (Gross, 2014) to understand how collective emotions can be regulated in intergroup contexts (Goldenberg et al., 2016). Within this model, individuals could use different strategies to regulate group-based emotions in different stages, including situation selection/modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change (of self-categorization or situation), and response modulation. By considering emotion generation as a temporal process, this model allows a more nuanced investigation of intergroup dynamics such as emotional contagion over time in conflicts. This framework also incorporates the self-categorization process into individual emotion regulation, emphasizing the role of group identification in amplifying or attenuating group-based

emotions. This perspective offers new opportunities to regulate group identification to intervene in the emotional outcomes of intergroup conflicts. The strategies synthesized in this model have received some empirical support. For example, cognitive reappraisal is shown to be an effective strategy in reducing group-based negative emotions, even in the context of intractable violent conflicts (Halperin et al., 2013, 2014). However, by reducing negative emotions, cognitive reappraisal may also come with costs of decreasing intentions to engage in actions (e.g., volunteering, protesting) in the context of political conflicts (Ford et al., 2019).

Notably, within societies that have salient power differentiation between majority and minority groups, emotion regulation might be especially important for majority groups with higher power (e.g., White individuals in the U.S.) (Ford et al., 2022). When White individuals are confronted with issues of racism and their racial privileges, they may have a constellation of negative emotions (e.g., discomfort, anger, anxiety, guilt) because they tend to appraise these situations as threatening their intention to be “good”. Accordingly, they may use defensive emotional regulation strategies (e.g., avoidance, silence) to regulate these negative emotions. However, these disengagement strategies are harmful to people of color and can be demotivating anti-racism actions, impeding interracial conflict resolutions. Therefore, it is important for White people to use engagement-focused strategies to regulate their emotions, such as reappraising the situation as an opportunity for growth and learning (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). More broadly, from a social justice perspective, people with power should take more responsibility in regulating their group-based emotions, in order to foster improved intergroup relations.

Improving Intergroup Conflict Resolution

The three sets of individual factors discussed in this chapter are to a large extent malleable and can be changed and trained. This malleability presents opportunities for designing

psychological interventions to help address real-world intergroup conflicts. In this section, we first introduce some examples of common approaches used in past research to design individual-based interventions; then, we discuss several implementation strategies that may influence the effectiveness of the interventions in intergroup conflicts.

Common Approaches

Active reflection exercises. One commonly used technique is active reflection exercises, in which participants receive structured instructions to reinterpret situations and events in an open-ended way (Walton & Wilson, 2018). Encouragingly, research has shown that even modest interventions like this can yield profound results, making them potentially accessible and feasible on a larger scale. For example, based on the theory and findings on wise reasoning, Brienza et al. (2021) designed a simple online intervention to improve White Americans' attitudes toward their perceived outgroup (i.e., Chinese and Asian people in general) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The intervention instructed participants to take the perspectives of different parties and take a bird's eye view. It asked participants several open-ended questions to help them engage in different aspects of wise reasoning. The results showed that this intervention increased participants' positive attitudes toward the outgroup. It also successfully attenuated the association between conservative political orientation and one's polarized intergroup attitudes.

Prompting new meanings. Another technique, especially popular in intervening with individuals' beliefs and mindsets, is prompting new meanings by teaching participants new facts and ways to think about themselves or the situations (aka "wise intervention"; Walton & Wilson, 2018). For example, teaching people that social groups are malleable can activate new meanings in the way people view groups in conflict (Halperin et al., 2011). When the intervention is designed in a more interactive and elaborate way, it may show promising long-term benefits. For

example, Goldenberg et al. (2018) implemented field interventions in workshop formats among Israelis during a 6-month period of frequent violence in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Compared with active control conditions (e.g., stress coping), the group malleability intervention, which taught participants that social groups such as nationality can be malleable, had significantly stronger effects on improving participants' hope, intergroup attitudes, and willingness to make concessions. Most importantly, the effects held even after six months, showing the durability of this mindset-based intervention.

Educational programs. Some interventions take a more holistic approach by targeting multiple factors through educational programs that last for a relatively long time. For instance, Welker et al. (2023) designed and evaluated an online educational program called Perspectives, which teaches behavior strategies to deal with conflict and enhance readiness to engage across group differences. This program blends multiple theoretical constructs discussed in this chapter, such as components of wise reasoning (e.g., intellectual humility, perspective taking), learning goal orientation, etc. Empirical research suggests that this program is effective in reducing participant's affective polarization, increasing their humility, and improving their conflict management strategies.

Implementation Strategies

The nature and issues involved in intergroup conflicts vary. To maximize the effectiveness of the intervention approaches in intergroup conflicts, researchers should consider the following challenges and implementation strategies.

Test generalizability and compare effectiveness. The effects of interventions may vary depending on factors like the specific intergroup conflict, societal and political contexts, and individual characteristics of participants. Currently, many intervention studies tend to focus on

only one specific context (e.g., interracial conflict in the U.S.). More research is needed to understand which intervention approaches are broadly effective versus those that may only work in limited contexts or social groups. Whenever possible, researchers should consider testing the effectiveness of a theory-based intervention across different intergroup contexts (e.g., Brienza et al., 2021). In addition, it will also be helpful to implement multiple interventions in one study to compare their effectiveness, adopting methodological advancements in intervention science, such as the intervention tournament approach (Hameiri & Moore-Berg, 2022) and the megastudy approach (Duckworth & Milkman, 2022).

Address potential backfires and customize based on groups. Close attention must be paid to how interventions may differentially impact socially advantaged versus disadvantaged groups involved in a conflict (Schellhaas & Dovidio, 2016). As discussed earlier, perspective-taking intervention could potentially backfire and increase outgroup bias for minority groups who face greater threats/uncertainties in their identities and relationships of power. Testing for potential backfires through pilot studies and adjusting the intervention approach can help address this challenge (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 2018). Matching the intervention style and content to be most relevant and engaging for different participant profiles may also increase efficacy (e.g., Halperin & Schori-Eyal, 2020).

Overcome resistance and motivational challenges. To successfully leverage the impact of psychological interventions, researchers and practitioners need to gain participation from groups unmotivated or opposed to change, which requires addressing underlying obstacles like threatened identities. Currently, most intervention research assumes that people are willing to opt into these interventions in the first place. In reality, individuals who would opt into interventions

may already be more open to change, limiting generalizability. Strategies are needed to engage broader populations, including skeptical audiences.

However, it can be challenging to engage those unmotivated, and research is lacking to address this issue (Landry, 2023). Motivation is a relatively understudied element in intergroup conflict resolution. For instance, although there is a long history of studying intergroup contact interventions, it is not until recently that research has started considering the motivational dimensions of contact, such as volition (i.e., the degree to which people engage in intergroup contact deliberately; Bagci et al., 2021). Future intervention research on intergroup conflict should incorporate motivation science to better understand the motivational processes that facilitate or hinder people's engagement in these interventions. For example, we may promote internal motivation for conflict resolution by appealing to personal values of equality/justice rather than external rewards.

Remaining Issues and Future Directions

Lastly, we would like to highlight a few remaining issues and future research directions we see as important and promising in intergroup conflict resolution research.

Expand the Criteria of Intergroup Conflict Interventions

The effectiveness of intergroup conflict interventions should be evaluated based on not a single or narrow criterion but multiple meaningful criteria. Recently, scholars have called for more systematic research to examine the nature of the effects of intergroup conflict interventions: whether they are more attitudinal (i.e. improved views of outgroups) or behavioral (i.e. increased willingness to cooperate and compromise). Sustainable solutions require progress in both domains (Brauer, 2023). Moreover, we believe that researchers should also start differentiating the quantity and quality aspects of intergroup conflict as two potentially different

criteria. Most research so far has conceptualized conflict quantity (e.g., the level of positive or negative attitudes and behaviors toward outgroups). However, intergroup conflict can differ qualitatively: while some conflicts are driven by the division of resources (resource conflict), others are driven by disagreements on beliefs and values (value conflict) (Böhm et al., 2020). It is important to understand when resource conflict may escalate to value conflict, and how we could change people's subjective perceptions of the qualitative nature of intergroup conflicts, to help de-escalate and ultimately resolve the conflict.

Diversify Identities and Societal Contexts

More intergroup conflict research needs to examine how individuals inhabit multiple, intersecting social identities simultaneously (e.g. ethnicity and gender) in order to understand how conflicts are experienced at these intersectional levels. Because individuals perceive targets' multiple social identities in an intersectional way (e.g., Petsko et al., 2022), future research should examine how the multiplicity of social identities may further complicate how intergroup conflicts can be resolved. Especially in the context of majority-minority conflicts, it is crucial to understand the experience of people with multiple marginalized identities. As Grigoryan et al. (2022) highlighted, interventions must address the interlocking systems of oppression that shape intergroup dynamics. Meanwhile, more research on intergroup conflicts in non-Western contexts is needed. By diversifying our samples and research contexts, we can gain insights into culturally specific (vs. universal) factors in conflict resolution, given that intergroup dynamics also differ based on broader social and historical contexts such as post-colonial experiences. A more diverse range of group identities and global societal settings should be explored.

Shift the Narratives of Outgroup Individuals from Threats to Contributions

One dominant perspective in intergroup research is how perceived threats from one's outgroups can lead to intergroup conflicts across different contexts, such as refugees (e.g., Landmann et al., 2019), racial minorities (e.g., Wu et al., 2023), and immigrants (e.g., Yong et al., 2021). Lowering people's perceived threat from their outgroups can be one way to mitigate negative intergroup attitudes and behaviors. However, to build positive intergroup relations, it may not be sufficient to merely reduce the perceived threats of outgroups. Indeed, recent research in the immigrant context found that people's beliefs about immigrants' realistic and symbolic contribution could predict more positive attitudes toward immigrants in societies and organizations, over and above perceived threats (Li & Kung, 2023). Building upon this new perspective, we call for more future research that shifts the narrative of social groups from threat reduction to contribution recognition. To realize real integration of different social groups, especially those traditionally marginalized and stigmatized, it is important to highlight people's individual value in societies. Highlighting mutual interdependence and how multiple social groups can together enrich society could promote inclusion. More broadly, intergroup conflict research could benefit from taking a more solutions-focused approach by highlighting the success stories of reconciled groups rather than just reviewing challenges among social groups.

Integrate Different Methodological Approaches

In the social psychology literature on intergroup conflicts, most studies use lab experiments to test the effectiveness of conflict resolution interventions. However, there are much fewer field experiments and longitudinal studies that examine the effectiveness and durability of those interventions in the real world. While laboratory experiments have the benefit of controlling variables, more research needs to be done to examine interventions as they occur in authentic community contexts facing real-world conditions. Studying interventions using

random assignment in natural program implementations would better demonstrate true effectiveness over the long run outside the lab. In general, more research is needed to assess the impacts of different interventions both longitudinally and qualitatively (Paluck, 2010) to understand the durability of effects across contexts and the underlying processes that enable social changes.

In addition, leveraging more advanced methodologies from other disciplines could significantly further our understanding of intergroup conflict dynamics. Computational modeling approaches, for instance, may lend novel insights into the complex, interactive relationships between psychological and contextual influences that evolve over time. Advancing knowledge of neurological and physiological processes through neuroimaging technologies like fMRI also promises to elucidate the biological underpinnings of conflict resolution. Moreover, emerging technologies such as machine learning present exciting opportunities to leverage large datasets to map the intricate process of intergroup conflict in granular detail. With such data-driven understanding, machine learning also allows the development of increasingly tailored interventions informed by real-world patterns.

Examine the Interactions with Other Pressing Societal Issues

In addition to intergroup tensions, societies worldwide grapple with many critical challenges that intersect in complex ways (Halevy & Cohen, 2019). Social psychologists ought to investigate how resolving ethnic, racial, or nationalist divisions may help or hinder the progress of other issues threatening humanity. Achieving peace across lines that once divided populations could cultivate cooperative mindsets and egalitarian values conducive to tackling collaborative problems. For instance, as climate change exacerbates risks to all people

everywhere regardless of identity, intergroup conflict resolution may facilitate united global action.

Empirical research supports this possibility. Recent work by Meleady et al. (2020) found that intergroup contact decreased social dominance orientation, which in turn promoted more environmentally responsible attitudes and behavior. With lowered preferences for hierarchy among social groups, individuals become more willing to safeguard shared natural resources in a sustainable way. This implies mitigating intergroup conflicts can broaden people's perspectives beyond self-interest, resulting in cooperative outcomes beyond intergroup relations. Future research should understand how intergroup dynamics play a role in global issues like disease, health disparity, poverty, food insecurity, etc. Capitalizing on the benefits of conflict resolution to cultivate cross-boundary cooperation provides an avenue to address shared problems confronting humanity worldwide.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored key individual factors that play a crucial role in the resolution of intergroup conflicts. We have examined lay beliefs, mindsets, reasoning strategies, and self-regulatory orientations, all of which contribute to successful conflict resolution. By leveraging these factors, interventions can be tailored to guide individuals towards more constructive approaches when faced with intergroup conflicts. Additionally, we have outlined potential avenues for future research in this field. Intergroup conflict resolution remains a significant and impactful topic within social psychology and the broader realm of social science. Continued research and efforts are necessary to build a peaceful and collaborative world, where individuals and communities can thrive in harmony.

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